

News Release

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'Empire Eagle Watch' Successfully Tests New York Wing's Communications and Sustained Reconnaissance Capabilities

NOVEMBER, 2002 -- The New York Wing conducted a homeland security training mission on Sept. 30, 2002, deploying 15 aircraft and a similar number of ground crews. Two aircraft from the Vermont Wing also joined the exercise, which was designed to test the Civil Air Patrol's ability to conduct a sustained reconnaissance mission primarily along the U.S.-Canadian border.

Dubbed "Operation Empire Eagle Watch," the day-long exercise staggered air crews for 2- to 3-hour sorties over 50-mile target areas throughout the day from three base camps scattered across northern New York, explained Lt. Col. Steve Perta, vice commander/north for the New York Wing. Lt. Colonel Perta crafted the training exercise along with Lt. Col. Bill Hughes, who acted as the incident coordinator.

"We wanted to test our ability to do sorties from self-sustaining bases; that is, to support air crews on a sustained mission without outside help and to ensure fast turnaround of crews," Lt. Colonel Perta said.

"It worked well at two bases, where our ground support provided food and beverages, but at the third base, where the crews depended on a local airport restaurant, we found it caused delays in getting crews back into the air."

Given a scenario of terrorists trying to gain entry to the U.S. using ground vehicles, boats and general aviation aircraft, both air and ground crews took digital photographs of designated reconnaissance areas along the border, including small and private airstrips. As crews returned to their bases, the digital photos were uploaded to the internet and shared among all base commands for coordination.

"We also wanted to test our communications capability," Lt. Colonel Perta noted. "We used three high-flying relay aircraft so that all the bases and air crews could be in constant communication. Aircraft checked in every 15 minutes. There was a lot of radio traffic."

He said he was happy to report "that CAP can respond to a notice of a possible threat activity by being able to provide sustained aerial reconnaissance over specific areas gathering information and providing it to federal, state and local officials." CAP Aircraft and crews are located across New York State and routinely respond to Search and Rescue and Disaster Relief needs. Homeland Security is a new arena that agencies are training for in the fight against terrorism.

A practical value to the exercise came as a result of the ground crew mission to survey and photograph small airports and private landing strips, and to get contact info for the sites (some of which are not on aviation charts).

“ELT (emergency locator transmitter) signals sometimes come from remote strips,” Lt. Colonel Perta pointed out. “Now we have contact numbers to call if a signal seems to be in their area.”

Some 150 personnel participated, including cadets who joined in all aspects of the ground activity.

The Western New York Group, Finger Lakes Group, South Central Group and Central New York Group operated out of a staging area in the western part of the state at Perry-Warsaw Airport, Town of Perry, Wyoming County.

The Mid-Eastern Group, Catskill Mountain Group, South Eastern Group and the Vermont Wing crews were assigned to the northeastern part of the state, operating out of Clinton County Airport at Plattsburgh.

The New York City Group and Long Island Group relocated to the north central part of the state at Oswego County Airport in Oswego.

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